

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY: A DOCUMENT OF THE ENFLESHED SPIRIT

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Introduction

We are going to examining Vincentian spiritual heritage of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity (SC) in North Sumatra, as enshrined in the words of their Constitution. It will become clear that spiritualities expressed in the words of documents are enfleshed spiritualities: moulded, influenced, and shaped by concrete and particular human historical situations. This section begins with a brief account of the sequential development of the SC Constitution. A thorough discussion and subsequent analysis will focus on the latest version of the foundational document published in 2003. A concluding section will close this examination.

CONSTITUTION IN THE MAKING: A SPIRITUALITY BEING ENSHRINED

The fundamental framework embodying the reason for being and the mission of the SC was written in stages over a period of 30 years. It began as an experimental draft, following the original trajectory of renewal envisioned by the 2nd Vatican Council. As the initial vision and scope of the SC mission changed in the wake of the fast-paced cultural and historical changes sweeping the world and affecting the universal Church, revisions became almost necessary as soon as a draft was completed. The existing Constitution, published in 2003, is the fourth document completed and revised over a period of three decades.

The Beginning: the Franciscan-Inspired Draft of 1972

The Second Vatican Council, through its decree *Perfectae Caritatis* (PC), called upon all religious congregations and orders to renew the spirituality of their institutions by going deep into the roots of their original founding charisms, and then to adapt themselves to the changing conditions of the time (PC: 01- 02). In response to this call, the SC of Schijndel, began a re-evaluation of the essentials of their congregation. One major issue was the status of their communities

abroad and their need of a rule of life appropriate to their particular situations.

In the Medan archdiocese of Indonesia, where the SC congregation was involved in a variety of ministries, the majority of the religious women congregations were Franciscans. This peculiar historical fact influenced the shape the local SC Constitution was to take. The SC General Board decided to use Franciscan-inspired documents as the point of departure for their own rules, in addition to "Op weg", a document of renewal in the Chapter of 1968-1969. As a result, the first Constitution published in 1972 was heavily influenced by Franciscan spirituality (Konstitusi 1972, pp. 3-4).

This influence can be seen in the statement of understanding of their religious life which is based on the testament of St. Francis (Aggaran Dasar 1972, pp. 9-11). The testament says: "When God gave me some friars, there was no one to tell me what I should do, but the Most High Himself made it clear to me that I must live the life of the Gospel" (Habig 1973: 68). Having this inspiration they also want to have Gospel as rule of life. Another example is the distinctive Franciscan spiritual mark that is poverty. Living life in poverty, the Franciscans understood themselves as *strangers and pilgrims* here on earth (Habig 1973: 68). Having this idea, the SCs also understood themselves as *strangers and pilgrims* here on earth (Aggaran Dasar 1972, p. 21).

A Document in Flux: The Draft of 1982

A decade of living out the spirit of the first published document for the Indonesian SCs passed. A second document came into being, the Constitution published in 1982. This was still obviously a Constitution-in-the-making, the result of continuing reflection, study and dialogue. Faithful to the renewal process called for by the 2nd Vatican Council, the SCs took fourteen years (1968-1982) to come up with this new draft (Konstitusi 1982, pp. 4-5).

The major change in this document is the explanation of the history of the Congregation. It gives information about the fundamental knowledge of the existence of the Congregation. For instance who is the founder, what the charism of the congregation is and how they should execute it (Konstitusi 1982, pp. 4-10). The SC grasped the charism of their congregation which they draw from the spiritual life of Vincent de Paul, that is, to bring the good news to the poor (Lk 4:18) (Konstitusi 1982, p. 7). The SC also stressed that, although Van Erp is the founder of the Congregation, they do not reduce his effort when they call Vincent

the main founder of the Congregation. They received Vincent's spiritual heritage through Van Erp, who chooses this spiritual heritage as the form for their religious life. Based on this self-understanding, they recognized themselves as one of the members of the Vincentian family who followed in the footsteps of Jesus Christ to bring the good news to the poor (cf. Konstitusi 1982, p. 6).

Culminating Document: Constitution of 1990 in Dutch, English & Indonesian

The long process of studying, reflecting and living out concretely the spirit of the SC Congregation is crystallized in the words of the third Constitution, published in 1990 in the Dutch language. Official approval by the Holy See was given on May 24th 1990. There is no significant change from the 1982 version.

But being a living document, no sooner did the ink dry on the pages than a new development required more changes to it. During the process of granting autonomy to the Indonesian Sisters (1985-1990), the Constitution of 1990 was adjusted to accommodate the realities on the ground: leadership issues, the local history of the congregation, and Diocesan rights. But the formulation of the Vincentian spiritual heritage was absolutely identical to the Constitution of 1990; it was translated into English as required by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Rome. This translated and amended Constitution was approved by the Holy See on November 19th 1990 as the official Constitution of the autonomous congregation of the SC in Indonesia. Later on this Constitution was translated into the Indonesian language.

A Revised Constitution for the New Millennium

Growing historical consciousness, the increasing temporal distance between the Dutch founding and the Indonesian flowering Congregation, and the major shift in the cultural and demographic realities, necessitated the revision of the 1990 Constitution as the Third Christian Millennium arrived. While the salient features and structure of the document published in 2003 remain that of the 1990 Constitution, it now contains a more complete history of the Congregation in North Sumatra, and it expresses the desire to be intentionally intercultural. The published Constitution of 2003 appends not only the letter of approval

of the Holy See, but also the letter of approval from the Archbishop of Medan in North Sumatra.

The Original Constitution

We have given a chronological overview of the development of the Constitution. We started with the 1972 document, then moved on to the 1982 document, then to the Constitution of 1990 and finally to the Constitution of 2003. However, as we have seen, the Constitution of 2003 basically is the translation of the original Constitution. Therefore, as we are making an in-depth analysis of the Constitution, it is best to go by the English version of the original Constitution, which was approved by the Holy See. This Constitution consists of 10 chapters containing 122 articles. Articles 02, 03, and 04 of Chapter I are particularly relevant as they express in a condensed manner the spirituality of the Congregation. References will be made to other chapters, including a statute which contains a practical explanation of the Constitution, so it is helpful to see the whole structure of the document. The chapter numbers and headings of the original Constitution are listed below:

Introduction	
Chapter-I	Purpose and status of our congregation (Article 01 to 06)
Chapter-II	Vows (Article 07 to 37)
Chapter-III	Prayer life (Article 38 to 42)
Chapter-IV	Community life (Article 43 to 48)
Chapter-V	Apostolate (Article 49 to 56)
Chapter-VI	Guidance and authority (Article 57 to 82)
Chapter-VII	General chapter (Article 83 to 87)
Chapter-VIII	Financial administration (Article 88 to 96)
Chapter-IX	Entrance into the congregation (Article 97 to 113)
Chapter-X	Leaving the community (Article 114 to 122)

Article 1

To make the world more liveable is the mission which all people face together. It is to this mission that we, members of the Congregation: Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary, Mother of Good Succour, established in Pematangsiantar, want to contribute by living the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In this respect we want to follow Christ more closely in building the Kingdom of God in this

world under the guidance of the Spirit. In liberty we chose for permanent commitment in religious life through profession of the evangelical counsels. As Sisters of Charity we follow the special teaching of Christ that love of God is simultaneously linked with love of man and express this in a life of prayer and service of others.

Article 2

The purpose of our religious community is:

- to let ourselves be guided on the way of Jesus Christ
- in unity with Him, standing in His tradition, to work together for a better world. We choose for a conscious turning to the poor, by living the spirituality of Vincent de Paul.

Article 3

In order to work towards this purpose we apply ourselves to prayer and study and direct response to the concrete needs. In the signs of times, in the development of the Church and society we try to understand these needs.

Article 4

May thus grow in our Congregation a spirit of simplicity, justice, love, faithfulness and mercy.

Article 5

It is our vocation and personal choice to broaden and deepen this life-project within the Congregation. It is our participation in the service of the Church in this world.

Article 06

Status of our Congregation.

As we read in the introduction of these Constitutions, the mother-congregation, established in Schijndel, Netherlands, has the papal right since 1881. On the 1st of

October 1989 our first documents and request to become an autonomous congregation of Sisters of Charity, established in Pematangsiantar, Sumatra, Indonesia were brought to Rome after the General Chapter of the mother-congregation had accepted and approved our request for autonomy in 1988. After that the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life has approved our documents and Constitutions, the Archbishop of Medan, Mgr. A.G. Pius Datubara OFMCAP., will (re)found our Congregation as Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary, Mother of Good Succour, established at Pematangsiantar, Sumatra, Indonesia as a Congregation of diocesan right.

ARTICLE TWO: A STATEMENT OF SPIRITUALITY

This section sets out to explain the purpose of religious life in general-- the imitation of Jesus Christ, and union with God, a purpose shared by the SC and pursued in their own particular way, i.e. through their own spirituality. The characteristics of their spirituality grow out of the vision and mission of Vincent de Paul as he taught and practiced religious life. It is his inspiration that gives concrete shape to the identity and self-understanding of the SC congregation. How the SC carry on living concretely this inspiration is made manifest in the ways they develop and nurture the virtues of religious life and mission. It will become clear at the end of this section that Article-Two is the SC congregation's statement of its spirituality.

The Purpose: Following Christ and Union with God

Article 2

The purpose of our religious community is:

- to let ourselves be guided on the way of Jesus Christ
- in unity with Him, standing in His tradition, to work together for a better world. We choose for a conscious turning to the poor, by living the spirituality of Vincent de Paul.

The Constitution states clearly that the core of the SC's religious life consists of letting themselves be guided in following Christ towards union with God for a better world. They choose consciously to attend to

the poor according to the spirituality of Vincent de Paul. What exactly is the meaning of this dense statement? The statement needs careful parsing (?).

The SC sings this song: "As the deer longs for the flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, o God. My soul thirst for God, the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God" (Psalm 42: 1-2). They sing this song many times in various occasions. The lyric of this song may be able to describe properly the spirit beneath their existence. Long for God, the living God. The heart desire that they long to see, to worship is God. To Him alone their spirit surrenders. This is the spirit which is latently present as a quiet force in the background, an inspiration and an orientation in their daily life (Waaïjman 2002: 1). In this spirit they consciously striving to integrate their life in terms, not of isolation and self-absorption, but of self-transcendence towards the ultimate value they perceive which is God Himself (Schneiders 1998: 39).

Longing to see the living God who is present within them inspires and leads to find the way towards Him. The way is allowing one self to enter the way of Jesus Christ. 'To allow' is a conscious and voluntary act. Allowing means knowing what is going on, letting oneself be involved in something. When a Sister declares 'I let myself' it means self-appropriation, at the very first instance. She is a knowing and willing centre of conscious action, who grasps herself as an 'I', a unity and identity in relation to other 'I's, the world, and to the Transcendent.

But what has this 'I' become self-conscious of? Through a process of careful discernment, she intends something, an action. What action does she intend to do? She intends 'to let' -- to accept, to agree with, and finally to be ready to practice it. But who is the subject of this act of letting? It is a reflexive act: she intends to give *herself* leave, give herself *permission: to let herself*. In a deeper sense, 'to let' oneself is to be consciously open to God's communication (word, call or invitation) and to stand ready to respond to Him. 'I let myself' is the beginning of a 'yes' to God on some matter of discernment.

Saying 'yes, I let myself' is a personal decision that has been reached. Here, the inner dimension of a person as self-constituting before herself and before God and the world is disclosed. The deepest centre of a person is open to the transcendent and ultimate dimension of being (Waaïjman 2002: 315). In openness to the ultimate dimension, the Sisters set about following Christ with a greater freedom in imitating him closely. *Perfectae Caritatis*, Vatican-II's decree on the adaptation and renewal of the religious life to modern time, states that following Christ

closely is the Divine Plan for those who are called and willing to embrace it (PC: 01).

Now, to whom does a Sister say 'I let myself'? Who is she speaking to? To whom does she pronounce her assent, her 'Yes'? The answer is to God, to His Divine Plan, to follow the way of Christ by imitating him; to be in loving relationship with the Father. ("Bind themselves to the Lord in a special way", PC: 01). A vital relationship with Jesus Christ as demonstrated in the life of men and women who follow Christ closely from the very beginning of the Church is the first aspect and the foremost foundation of someone's religious life (PC: 01- 02). Those who follow in the footsteps of Jesus were touched by his words and deeds.

For example, Vincent de Paul was deeply moved by the way Jesus showed his concern for the poorest and the least. Jesus revealed to them how God loved them by his words and deeds. The personality of Jesus attracted Vincent so powerfully that he decided to follow him, to live like him, to do what he did by continuing his mission to establish the Kingdom of God, with a genuine commitment to the neediest. This is what "imitation of Christ" means: one binds oneself to the Lord in a special way. This is exactly the direction that the SC, who "let themselves", take: the intimate and close imitation of Christ who is the ultimate norm of religious life (Konstitusi 2003, p. 6; 01, 07¹; PC: 02).

Jesus is the norm of religious life. In His life: His words and deeds, His mission, passion, death and resurrection we find the defining relationship between humanity and divinity. We know what it means to be human before God, that is, to be like Jesus, one who gives God's spirit in and through the gift of oneself in self-sacrificial love (cf. Downey 1997: 36-37). Jesus grows in wisdom and understanding before God and man (Lk 2: 40, 52). He addresses God as "Abba". It reveals a dimension of His understanding and experience of God as Father. Confidence, respect and intimacy are the characteristic of the relationship between Father and Son (Doohan 1993: 2-3). In this particular way of relating God, Jesus grows in perfect love for His Father, and perfect surrender to His will.

Jesus' living in perfect self-surrender to the Father is precisely what the rich young man would not allow himself to do in the parable Jesus tells (Mt.19:16-23). The rich young man could not surrender to the perfect divine love to which Jesus entrusted Himself, completely one as He was with Abba, completely self-giving along with Him (John 17:23). Jesus dwells in God and shares God's divine life. This is union with God. And this is what the SC desire to do and state so simply in their

¹ From here on, unless specified otherwise, the numbers between the brackets will refer to the relevant articles in the Constitution of 2003.

Constitution. The intention of their religious life is to give themselves permission to live in perfect self-surrender to the perfect divine love to whom Jesus has entrusted himself. By so doing, the SC, too, will dwell in God and share God's divine life.

The SC expresses this total self-giving to follow Christ through the profession of the evangelical counsels: chastity, poverty and obedience. This is the culmination and definitive form of their choice to respond God's call (01). This profession not only brings genuine transformation of the SC but a solemn, formal, and public commitment that establishes the Sisters in a state of life (cf. Schneiders 2001: 101).

In this way one's entire life is intended to fulfil God's service and to seek God solely (PC: 05). The "great commandment" of love of God and neighbour is the locus of this practice in active mission (Mk 12:29-31). It is the central point in the spirituality of Vincent de Paul. In fidelity to this Vincentian spirituality, the SC attend to the poor in concrete ways, fostering their humanisation through education and health care (24, 28). In and through a variety of ministries, they work together to create a better, more liveable world, manifesting here and now dimensions of the Kingdom of God (01, 50). It is to live life as Christ has lived it out, to see things from His point of view and to desire what He desired. To let, to permit themselves to live in perfect self-surrender to God as Jesus did. All SCs are invited to broaden and deepen this vision of Vincent de Paul within the Congregation in consonance with their own personal calling (05).

The SC way of life shows us that God is the ground and source of being, beginning and end, origin and destiny of all one's life. It is to God's Spirit that one should open to in order to know and to accept explicitly who one is and who one is called to become.

The Evangelical Counsels

The nature of the evangelical counsels is an exhortation to a choice which can further and deepen one's choice for God. These counsels facilitate a condition of being alert to the need to let go the obstacles in order to follow Jesus more deeply. A commitment to self-giving to God because of love of Him requires readiness to let go of all the obstacles. Chastity, poverty and obedience become the framework of living, making a lifelong commitment to live them. These evangelical counsels then become the law of one's existence. At the bottom line it expresses the self in reference to the Absolute. These counsels reflect

Jesus' own attitudes and are modelled on his life and ministry (Merkle 1998: 96-100).

Chastity

Chastity "for the sake of kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 19:12) is a gift of grace. This vow involves being unmarried, living in consecrated celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of God (cf. Schneiders 2001: 30). This counsel points to their readiness to have a single commitment to live for God alone and to dedicate their entire life to this service (27, 29). The SC are seeking God solely with an undivided heart. This seeking out is marked by contemplation that fixes their minds and hearts on Him (cf. PC: 12).

The consequence of this choice is being "alone". This is accepted in a positive way because it will lead the consecrated religious to a condition in which they are more ready for God and for others in spite of the loneliness that they may encounter (29). This status is the most suitable means of dedication with an undivided heart. Indeed, this vow is a project of a whole life. It is not fulfilled when the SC profess it. It has to be put into practice constantly and always be reflected on. From this practice, gradually the SC will gain wisdom. Consciousness of its value and openness to internalize it will help them to have a deeper understanding of it, inspiring them to contribute to the building up of the Kingdom of God (31). It will lead them consistently towards full, life-time commitment.

How do they nourish the counsel of chastity? This involves the creation of a healthy community life by developing a strong sense of Sisterhood among the members of the congregation. Friendship is recognized as a source of strength in living out and growing in the calling to chastity. Mutual encouragement and trust build up the authentic Sisterhood and friendship that strengthens fidelity to their choice (29, 33).

However, apart from this collective responsibility for chaste living, every SC has to take personal responsibility for herself. This is vital because the response to a religious calling is ultimately a deeply personal one. One has to make conscious choices before acting on them. For example, SCs are encouraged to be self-aware in their choice of recreational activities (reading, television, music, sports) knowing how highly-sexualized many entertainment media are. They have to know the consequences for themselves (33). In daily life, the Sisters should avoid low-quality chatting and they must refuse to behave impolitely

towards anybody. They have to act in an ethical way. They must dress properly such that, at least, it does not invite negative remarks. When they talk, they must use appropriate words which are not containing any negative thought (cf. Statute 2003: 5).

Poverty

At first sight, it seems that the main issue of poverty has to do with the ownership, use, consumption, and accumulation of material goods. It says in the Constitution that the SC is only allowed to use things that are necessary for daily life (23) – “not to use things more than we need for life and mission” (26). However, the idea behind this counsel is to regulate the circumstances that make total dedication to God possible and viable. So, indeed, there is the primary sense of poverty as relinquishing something—whatever may hinder the person from her goal of following Christ totally must be left behind. This harkens back to the story of the wealthy young man in the Gospel (Matt.19:16-23). Material goods are means to better serve God and love the neighbour. They are not to be kept simply as property. By sharing all material goods in common, a certain detachment from them develops (14).

But beyond mere detachment from material things, the vow of poverty contains a rich spiritual meaning for vowed religious. It is recognition that all they have, from talents, good will, to even the desire to respond totally to their religious calling, are gift given by God and received by them. Therefore, this vow is also an invitation to reflect again and again that all things that they have, material and spiritual, come from God and must return to God a hundred fold (25).

Towards this purpose, a religious novice is asked to give up management of any property she may have. She can choose who will manage and make use of it (17, 18). Before professing perpetual vows, every SC has to write an official letter according to the laws of the state, naming the beneficiary and manager of her estate. It can be the Congregation or a relative or someone else. The Sister decides this in dialogue with the Mother General of the Congregation (17, 18). From this point on, everything that the SC receives automatically belongs to the Congregation (21). All these are ways to detach the SC from owning or managing private property.

The counsel of poverty opens up the personal space to attend to the poor concretely in order to improve their lives (24). The SC must therefore be aware of the causes of poverty itself. In a wider social context, poverty is result of the attitude of people who take too much

from others for themselves, and who seek to maintain this inequitable system of dividing the material wealth of the world. Sensitized to this social condition, the SC has to support such actions that demand justice and peace through a fairer sharing of the goods of God's creation (25).

How is this vow carried out in daily life? The statutes of the SC include guidelines for the prudent use of electricity, the telephone and vehicles for transportation. They are to break the habits of a "throw-away" society by simplifying taste and limiting choices and consumption. They are to avoid the appearance of luxurious living both personally and in community. Things that belong to the community are treated as community property. Common ownership means not keeping objects in one's own room or lending them outside to others without permission of community members. The SC has to exercise judicious use of pocket money by being held accountable for every penny (Statute 2003: 4-5).

Obedience

The objective of the vow of obedience is to align one's will to the will of the Father (PC: 14). This is the core of the SC's commitment to imitate the example of Jesus Christ who came to do the will of God (Cf. John 4:34; 5:30). But how is it to live out this vow? The Constitution says that the SC have to follow the deeds of Jesus Christ who created a better world by standing up for the weak, by caring for the sick, by relieving people of the burden of ignorance, by helping people who are addicted (possessed by demons), by calling oppressors to their better selves, and by healing all kinds of sicknesses. The vow of obedience has led to the Sisters holding a variety of ministries (34-35).

The vow of obedience also invites religious to be courageous in being servants, particularly when the leader of the congregation asks certain tasks not in accord with the particular desires of a member. Members are asked to surrender their will for the greater good of fulfilling the wider goals of the congregation. The vow of obedience paves the way to appropriating for oneself, one's own religious calling within the community. Through obedience, one learns to personally care for the "fire" of the work of God burning in the congregation. A member's obedience becomes her expression of love (cf.36).

The Constitution binds the SC to reject the kind of living that would separate them from the world. This is a positive view of the world and of human kind. They want to be sensitive to the social circumstances of the people among whom they live. They are to be

ready to be responsive to their needs, and this can only happen if they are obedient, i.e., they are willing and active listeners to the cry of those who most need their assistance (36).

Living the evangelical counsels means journeying towards God in an encounter with Him in everyday life. It is a response to God's call where one seeks to be more open to His hidden presence and having life hidden in Him. The religious ideals expressed by the evangelical counsels and their practices make it clear that following in the footsteps of Jesus is something that one cannot take for granted. It is a grace that they have to ask and plead for in prayer, and then work to accomplish it in themselves (38). As this journeying progresses, so does the holiness grow and bloom within and among these pilgrims. The SC grow more and more into the children of God that they already are, united to Him in the midst of a messy world, being saved by Him at the same time they are being His instruments of healing a wounded creation.

The Sisters follow Christ in Vincent's Way

To follow Christ towards union with God, which I have just discussed, has been lived out by Vincent. In the journey of His spiritual conversion, which I have discussed extensively in Chapter I, Vincent gradually came to know and more and more grow in the conviction that God had a special plan, a call for him. This God who initiated his conversion and to whom Vincent responded wholeheartedly calls him to follow in the footsteps of His own beloved Son. But which model of following Christ? It is to be the Evangelizer to the Poor (cf. Ryan 1995: 140-141).

Vincent is the spiritual father of the SC. Indirectly he inspires the SC to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. The SC reflect this timeless inspiration and writes it down in their Constitution. Right in the beginning of the Constitution this is shown. "The form of religious life of the Sisters is according to the characteristics and spirit of Saint Vincent" (Konstitusi 2003, p. 2). These characteristics are clarified as follows: "the Sisters would practice all works of charity according to the spirit and rule of Vincent" (Konstitusi 2003, p. 8). In the same Constitution, in article 49, it is stated "Vincent's spirit determines our direction".

The teaching of this spiritual father of the congregation is embedded in the Constitution. Why? What is the significance of laying it down? It is meant to give direction, to guide each one of the SC in their personal and collective journey in the Congregation. These teachings should constitute their life in following in the footsteps of Christ. How

does Vincent surrender himself perfectly to God? How does he devote himself to Jesus whom he addresses as his Lord and Master? How does he live his life as a servant? And finally who are the poor for him? All these questions lead us to know how Vincent, consequently his spiritual daughters, the SC, follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Trust and follow God, the Divine Providence

One of Vincent's significant teachings is 'to trust and follow God, the Divine Providence'. He gave direction as follows: never go ahead of God, never go a step ahead of God, but follow His sign, the Divine guide. It is not a matter of forcing success or wanting to manage Providence but to keep pace with providence and not march beyond it (Konstitusi 2003, p. 10). This teaching expresses his profound faith in God who will look after him in His loving, wise care and who will bring him safely to the goal of his life (cf. Wright 1995: 1063-1064).

'Transformation' this word may be the appropriate term to describe what has happened to Vincent. His life is a transformation from someone who is material-oriented to someone who is God-oriented. 'Trust and follow the Divine-providence' he said. This is an act of faith. It shows the direction and intentionality of his spiritual way where the relational process between the Divine and Vincent is taking place. He knows God and is aware of His presence, His loving care and power, he recognizes His way and follows it because God has revealed His Self to him (cf. Wright 1995: 1063). This transformation refers to the most significant transition in the divine-human relational process (cf. Waaijman 2002: 455-456).

After his conversion, faith in God whom he addresses as Divine Providence² plays a central role in all his life. He surrenders himself into God's hands. He knows that God is love and wants him to go to Him through love. He grows in the knowledge that humility is an important attitude to grow deeper in faith. This understanding leads him to humble himself before God and others (Mezzadri 1992: 42). He also gains the awareness that relationship with God is more important than temporal affairs; spiritual health is more important than physical health; God's glory is more important than human approval (Maloney 1992:

². Providence is the name of God. In His providential act, He brings the motions of human existence into meaning. Meaning has a twofold origin: God's gracious power revealing meaning and humanity's evolving insights in assessing meaning. The attribution of meaning to human understanding allows faithful humanity to experience divine care (Doherty 1993: 790-791).

172). This faith makes him confident in all his activities. "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice, and all those things which you need will be given to you as well" (Mt 6:33), Vincent said.

This faith originates in his humdrum life among the poor. In His generous act, God discloses His Self to Vincent. He reveals His face through the face of the poor. He makes His voice heard and communicates His plan to Vincent through the voice of the poor. The poor is the place where the presence of God unfolded to Vincent. Added to this experience of encountering God, people around him reinforced God's plan for him. As we have seen from his biography and his spirituality (Chapter II) the unfolding of his priestly ministry was enabled by powerful women of the royalty. His ecclesiastical views were influenced by contemporaries, like Francis de Sales. The way of caring for sick poor people was showed by a simple girl, Margaret Naseau. All these people gave a spark of direction to his life. In the light of his faith Vincent asked himself, who brought these people into my life? Who was behind all their actions? Who initiated their interventions? To Vincent it is Almighty God who makes His Presence unfold and reveals His unseen plans (cf. Common Rules: XI: 10).

This faith led him to the knowledge and conviction that God was the author of the Works of Charity, and all the good that he had done in the service of the poor. He had utter trust in God's unseen plans, which work through human history to reveal God's love (cf. Maloney 1992: 172-174).

"Trust and follow the design of God, Divine Providence", "Surrender yourself perfectly to Him" is the way that he laid down for his spiritual daughters. Thus reflection of their ordinary experience in encountering people, which is the place where God reveals Himself, is the way of the SC to relate themselves to God.

Follow Jesus Christ, Lord and Master who came to be the Evangelizer of the Poor

Another teaching which is typical for Vincent is 'follow Jesus Christ, Lord and Master who came to be the Evangelizer of the Poor'. Jesus, one who completely gives himself to God and serves His Kingdom by bringing good news to the poor, is the image of Christ that Vincent had vividly in mind. It should not surprise us. Vincent encounters God who discloses His Self in the face of the poor and makes His voice heard through their voice. It is through the poor that God reveals His calling to Vincent. Vincent is always amazed and finds himself lacking for words when he tries to express his joy whenever he

thinks of this call. He believes this call is the most noble call in the Church (cf. Waaijman 2002: 161).

This faith and love of God, the exemplary life of the Beloved Son, and His ministry to the poor moved him powerfully, and in turn Vincent boldly followed His example. He made a genuine commitment to Jesus by following him, living like him, doing what he did to the needy. To Vincent this Jesus whom he calls Lord and Master is the source and model of his own life. He is source because He is the incarnation of God, who brings humankind to the fullness of God's purposes in ushering in a new creation, a renewed and redeemed people. He is model because His life is an exemplary life. He gives himself completely to the Father and serves His Kingdom by preaching the good news of salvation to poor people in and through the gift of Himself in self-sacrificial love. Love of God and neighbours is so vividly shown in and through His life (cf. Downey 1997: 36-37).

Vincent recognised that Providence called him to follow in the footsteps of His Own Son to be the Evangelizer of the Poor. Vincent responded to it. He devoted himself to the Beloved Son of God. But what form did this devotion take? It is devotion in action. It is along the path of action that he inspires and encourages his followers to follow Jesus in the deeds of liberating his people, releasing them from the bondage of their corporal and spiritual wounds (cf. Maloney 1992: 22-25).

The SC have modelled their life on Vincent. They have reformulated, in the words of the Constitution, Vincent's deep compassion for the lot of those who are suffering. The Constitution tells that Vincent worried because the poor died of hunger and their spiritual life was in danger. This description points to Vincent's top priority in his mission during his life time: to serve the poor as Jesus had done! They keep this story as a living memory for them, as reference of their religious life (Konstitusi 2003, p. 10).

Devotion to Jesus by extending his good news to the poor is a distinctive form of the service of the SC. Thus the emphasis of following in the footsteps of Jesus is on active imitation. Establishing works of charity is the Congregation's way to follow Jesus, by releasing His people from the bondage of their corporal and spiritual wounds. The poor must benefit from this ministry, and the Constitution suggests that SC should be present especially in the places where the life of people has not yet had a proper chance to develop (51).

This specific model of following Christ, in the very terms of Luke's gospel which is so central to Vincent, is fundamental to the SC. *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, He has anointed me to bring good news to the*

Mida Purba, The Constitution of the Sister of charity

poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free" (Lk.4:18).

Be a Servant to the Needy

The next teaching is 'be a servant to the needy'. Vincent's understanding of being servant comes from Christ who comes to be an evangelizer, a servant to the poor. Consequently, Vincent who modelled his life on Him, saw himself as a servant to poor people, those who are materially and spiritually lacking or disadvantaged. He transmits this spirit to the DC (Román 1999: 124, 454). He shares with them his faith that from all eternity God had wanted them for the service of the poor. Vincent's own words express this faith, as Mezzadri quotes it.

In the past there were plenty of religious orders; there were plenty of hospitals founded for helping the sick; they were plenty devoted nuns to serve them; but up to now no one ever saw the sick being cared for in their own rooms. If some member of a poor family fell ill the husband had to be separated from his wife, the wife from her children, and the father from his family. Up to now, my God, you did not appoint any order to help them; and it seemed as if your adorable providence, which leaves no one out, did not bother about them (Mezzadri 1992: 44).

The essence of visiting the poor is the desire to serve. Service comes first. To point out this special call, Vincent says this memorable phrase "Leaving God for God". The DC have to obey the call of God to serve His poor children, such that they can leave scheduled prayers or other activities and then go to serve the poor (Mezzadri 1992: 45).

We also can find the servant-type in Vincent's own personal narrative. He did not take the initiative: he was sent and he followed, because he trusted in the Divine guide. "Do not go ahead of Divine Providence," Vincent would caution his daughters (cf. Konstitusi 2003, p. 10). What exactly does that mean? A servant's disposition is primarily one of listening and then carrying out the orders of his Master. God guides, the servant of God, follows His direction. This distinctive Vincentian way is the way of his spiritual offspring, the SC. Serving the needy is their way to relate themselves to Jesus Christ.

The Poor and the Sick are Our Masters

The last teaching is 'the poor and the sick are our masters'. Vincent was greatly inspired by the story of Mathew's Gospel where Jesus identifies Himself with the poor. "When they are hungry, I am hungry, Jesus said. When they are sick, I am also sick. When they are in prison, I am also in prison, he continues. Therefore whatever you do to them, you do that to me", Jesus said (cf. Mt 25: 35-36). Through grace, God's Self communication to Vincent, he was able to discover the truth of Jesus' words. These words were no longer mere words to him, but a reality where he encountered God, the Invisible Reality. Vincent saw the presence of God in and through the poor. "The Son of God, whose will it was to be poor, is represented to us by these creatures", Vincent said (Maloney 1992: 24). Almost nothing new here; Vincent only grows deeper in his relation with God, the Divine Providence. We know that Vincent had encountered God who has disclosed His Self to Vincent in and through His poor creatures. This experience of encountering God enabled him to see His Hidden Presence among His poor children.

Vincent said: "The poor and the sick are our masters; therefore we have to love them with tenderness and respect them". Based on this faith, Vincent points out some specific forms of conduct and attitude toward the poor.

The first attitude is obedience. Obedience is the attitude of being consistently focused on the sick and the poor. In a concrete way it is practiced by only going where the work require them to go and not wasting time in useless visits (Waaijman 2000:21-22). The second attitude is reverence. This is done by being aware that the poor are the masters because God is present among them. "Be gracious and gentle in your dealings with the poor. You know that they are our masters and that we must love them with tenderness and respect them", said Vincent (Waaijman 2002:52). The awesomeness of the poor is grounded in the fact that they make the Lord present. This leads to the third basic attitude, that is, modesty. It is an attitude of being available to the poor without any self-interest. The fact that the Lord is present among the poor, gives no reason to reject the poor who are in need of help. This modesty is a holy attitude because what we respect is more than a human person. In contact with the poor, modesty is not a social virtue, but a divine attitude. In the poor, God's presence is to be found (Waaijman 2000: 24-26). In other words, for the SC discerning God's presence in and through His poor creatures in ordinary day life, is the way to see God, and to come into close contact with Him.

This active imitation of Christ is attainable because Vincent's certainty is founded on prayer and inner life. He said: in order to give oneself totally to others one must unite oneself with God. Pray, then you are capable of doing anything. And if you do not care for your spiritual life, you will fail in everything. He made clear that the role of prayer is significant in following Christ as we will discuss further on in my comment on prayer according to the Constitution (Konstitusi 2003, p. 10).

A summary of Vincent's vision and mission of following in the footsteps of Christ is found in the Constitution.

The fundamental point in Vincent's spirit is that the love of God and the love of people, which are theoretically one, are made one in practice by him: he loved God in people. His love of God was incarnated in deeds, in doing well to others. Let us love God, but let it be in the strength of our arms and in the sweat of our face (Konstitusi 2003, p. 9).

This distinctive imitation of Christ is expressed in one of his conferences. He said, all orders or congregations aim at loving God, but love Him in different ways. Carthusians by solitude, Capuchins by poverty, others, again, by singing His praises, but we are bound to show it by leading people to love God and their neighbour (Maloney 1992:22-23).

Vincent, who formulates the charism³ of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, is the spiritual father, the main founder, of the SC (Konstitusi 2003, pp.8-9). Through his teaching, the SC shape their own identity and self-understanding of their congregation, that is, to love God and His children by following the way of Christ who is a servant, an evangelizer of the neglected people.

³ . Pope Paul VI affirms that the charism of the founder or foundress of religious family was nurtured by God for the benefit of His Church. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. This is the reason why the Second Vatican Council insists on the obligation of religious to be faithful to the spirit of their founder or foundress, to their evangelical intention. The charism of religious life is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, who is always at work within the Church. He wrote this affirmation in 1971 in his apostolic exhortation on the renewal of the religious life according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (article 11).

Consequently the spirit of the Evangelizer of the Poor is the spirit of the SC (cf. the records of the regional meeting of the SC in 1982 and 1987 in Pematangsiantar). This spirit is not only inspiration and orientation but it is also a driving force within themselves, enabling the SC to be consciously striving to transcend herself to God, neighbours and the world (Maloney 1992: 13; Schneiders 1998: 39; Waaijman 2002: 1).

Vincentian Spirituality as Expressed in the Name of the Congregation

Having discussed the specific way of the SC in imitating Christ, we move on to see another aspect of the spirituality of the Congregation as it is expressed in its name. The name of the congregation is Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary, Mother of Good Succour (01). First we deal with “Sisters of Charity”, then with “Mary, Mother of Good Succour”.

Sisters of Charity

The name ‘Sisters of Charity’ refers to the fact that the Sisters are called to love God. ‘Sister of Charity’ means one who loves God or is called and chosen to love God. This is the heart of their calling that they must cultivate and internalize. They have to keep this understanding alive within themselves because this is crucial to the Vincentian model, to such an extent that it actually determines whether they are really SC or not. What makes a person become a SC is not so much the external activities, but foremost it is the inward attitude of love of God, rising up within the person. Vincent made a sharp and short comment on this when he gave a conference to the Daughters of Charity which is also applicable to the SC.

It is not by length of time that people judge whether a daughter is worthy of the beautiful name daughter of charity, but whether she is inwardly clothed with this garment of love of God and neighbour. This is what makes a person a daughter of charity (X, 461⁴) (Waaijman 2002: 163).

⁴ Ce n’est pas par la longueur du temps que l’on juge si une fille est digne de porter ce beau nom de Fille de la Charité, mais bien si elle est revêtue intérieurement de cette robe de la charité pour Dieu et pour le prochain. C’est cela qui fait la Fille de la Charité.

To love God implies to love one's neighbours. A calling to love God obliges one to give service to others, especially the poor (50, 51). But what does love actually mean? I would like to refer to what Vincent thought about it. For him love means that we wish the best for every one, desire that everyone is aware of her or his value, holding her or him in high regard, satisfying her or his needs in so far as it depends on us. This love is closely related to mercy. Mercy is making our hearts sensitive to the suffering and misery of others. Seeing someone else's misery affects us, moves us. From this point of view we can see that love is an orientation to others and mercy is an inner movement to do something for the benefit of others (54).

Love of God and people, especially the poor, is manifested in charitable works, such as being involved in the development of society by giving education, taking care for elderly people, the sick and handicapped, looking after those who are in need and looking after those groups of people who are ignored by society (52,53). These are the ways to live and practice love of God and others.

In order to perform charitable works in a proper way, the SC must allow their performance or their actions to pervade them, in such a way that the actions are integrated within themselves. This is a process of internalisation. The way to do this is through meditation. The SC should reflect and meditate on their actions. In their meditation the SC visualize what has happened in their actions. This is done by letting their actions speak to them. Some questions may be useful like "what have I done, what have I said, what have I understood, what was my reaction? Was it good? What makes it good? Was it bad? What makes it bad? What does God want me to do? Does He have a message for me in and through this experience?" It is a time to listen carefully to the answers that come out in the meditation. They need to be open in listening to their words and to let it pervade themselves in complete silence. These exercises will guide them and teach them to recognise what is the right path, and what is not responding to their calling. The effect of this meditation is that the calling to love God and others gains depths and strength. The Constitution summarizes all this as 'being aware with one's own self' (39).

This awareness is very important because it provides a space to let God be involved within them. In this regard Vincent gives direction as follows:

A way of doing it as God wants; it is to act in love, in love, my daughters. Ah! That this may turn your service

to an excellent one! But do you know what this means: act in love? It means: act in God, for God is love, that is, act completely, purely because of God (IX, 249⁵) (Waaajman 2000: 38).

A really merciful act is transparent and allows a glimpse of God, a moment where God has a chance to show his mercy. Through an act of mercy, an attitude of serving the poor with goodness, softness and respect, one makes the presence of God tangible. "If you are a speaker, speak in words which seem to come from God; if you are a helper, help as though every action was done at God's orders..." (I Pet 4:11). This is possible when one allows her act in mercy to be taken up to the act of God's mercy.

Fulfilling this magnificent calling, to be a SC, is not an easy task. It requires consistency to love God above all and the will to change the conduct that makes oneself appropriate to this calling. Vincent was very much aware of this. His guidance in this regard is to keep ourselves in this direction; we must surrender ourselves entirely to God and allow this truth to pervade us so that all our action will be determined by it, because God has called us as instrument of this immeasurable love. And leading a life by this conviction about the importance of this calling Vincent says, "God needs us to spread this kind of love". Because: "for God has no other hands, no other face and no other heart than ours" (XII, 262⁶) (Waaajman 2000: 38-39).

To be a SC is to be ready in God's service with all talents. Willing to follow in the footsteps of His Beloved Son, who allowed Himself to be taken up by a vision of one better world in which there is no hunger, fear and hatred (49, 50). This is the intention of their life. Self-awareness about this intention will lead the SC to accomplish their purpose, that is, self- sanctification (2003, p: 6).

Mary Mother of Good Succour

⁵ Un moyen de le faire comme Dieu veut, c'est de le faire en charité, en charité, mes filles. Oh! Que cela rendra votre service excellent! Mais savez-vous ce que c'est que le faire en charité? C'est le faire en Dieu, car Dieu est charité, c'est le faire pour Dieu tout purement.

⁶ Nous devons bien nous donner à Dieu pour imprimer ces vérités en non âmes, pour diriger notre vie selon cet esprit et pour faire les œuvres de cet amour.

The second part of the name of the Congregation is 'Mary Mother of Good Succour'. For the SC, living in Christ is living in close relation with Mary, the one who had perfect faith and brought the incarnation of God. She was chosen to bring Jesus Christ to us. This is the major reason for the great respect that the SC have for Mary. Another reason is that their congregation has submitted itself to the protection of "Mary Mother of Good Succour" (01). Many names have been given to Mary. For the SC, "Mary Mother of Good Succour" is another name for Mother Mary. It emphasizes her special calling; she is a helper for all Christians and also for the congregation of the SC (Directorium, *Derde deel, Schijndel* ---: 16-18).

Mary is also a model of total selflessness in listening to God. Christians, including the SC, discovered in Mary the incarnated ideal of what it means to listen to the Word of God in Scripture and in life. She believed in the Word of God in every circumstance of her life, and did this without understanding many things. Pondering everything in her heart until the light comes (Lk 2: 19, 50-51). Mary is the SC's inspiration and they receive a spiritual strength from her. They feel part of the progeny of the Woman. Their relationship with Mary is not to be reduced to a mere devotional attitude; rather it is a trait outlining their spirituality (Consecrated life today 1994: 223).

Every day, the SC pray the *Angelus* three times to remind themselves of the mystery of the Incarnation of God in His Son Jesus. In faith, this practice has deep meaning because the Incarnation of God is the most important event in the history of human kind. God's Incarnation in and through Jesus Christ brings back human beings to their final goal, that is God Himself. Therefore the SC pray for some moments to remember the history of the incarnation, death and resurrection which is a great event of salvation. For the SC the praying of the angelus is also a prayer of paying respect to Mary who brought new life in Christ. This is their way of living with Mary, a humble woman with profound faith and a constant care for the salvation of human kind (Directorium, *Derde deel, Schijndel* ---: 18).

The explanation of the role of Mary concludes with practical things: "Why am I not praying the rosary, in my small difficulties, when I have a tight schedule which makes my body and spirit weary, when I am tempted to be sad, to reject or to argue, why am I not going to Mother Mary?" (Directorium, *Derde deel, Schijndel* ---: 18-19). The SC again will find peace in Mary, in praying the rosary, and then again will find the presence of the Lord in their life. The Rosary is a precious prayer; it is a meditative and contemplative prayer.

ARTICLE THREE: A STATEMENT OF WORKING OUT PURPOSE

Article 3

In order to work towards this purpose we apply ourselves to prayer and study and direct response to the concrete needs. In the signs of times, in the development of the Church and society we try to understand these needs.

Having explained the purpose of the Congregation and the spirituality of the SC, in this section I am going to elaborate of how they accomplish it. This is dealt with in Article 3.

Article 3 states that in order to work out the purpose of the congregation, the SC must apply themselves to prayer and study, and to give a direct response to concrete needs, by paying attention to the signs of the times and the development of the Church and society (03). I will explain these three focuses, one by one.

Prayer

The first focus is prayer. Prayer is the human's vital orientation to God (Waaijman 2002: 667-668). Prayer is source, foundation, and energy of the SC's calling. "Our religious life will not be firm and it will fail if it does not depend on prayer" (38). To point out the vital meaning of prayer, their statute says it is as a breath of life (Statute 2003: 6). Prayer is associated with breath. When there is no breath, life ends. The same way, when there is no prayer, the calling ends. Both, the Constitution and the Statute make clear that though the SC is an active congregation, it is not without prayer. Active mission and prayer are going hand in hand. A careful formulation shows this! 'Our religious life... will fail if it does not depend on prayer', Prayer is 'breath, life'.

Based on this reality every SC has to give attention to prayer, both in a private way as well as in a collective way, within the community. The Constitution says that every SC needs to pray, and therefore she has to take time for it, being silent in the presence of the Lord and making necessary reflection. Jesus has given an example. He placed everything in relation with God. He took time to be alone and to have a real communication with His Father. He prayed alone and with others, even when He was busy with works. In this way He brought people to God and God to people. The SC learns from Him that there is a mutual

influence between prayer and action. In silence the SC would know what drives them in all their conducts (39).

About community prayers, the Constitution says that, apart from paying attention to private prayer, we also have to pay attention to praying together as community (40). Forms of common prayers are reading and meditating Sacred Scripture, morning and evening prayers, Eucharist, yearly retreat, monthly recollection, devotion, especially to Mary, and receiving the sacrament of reconciliation to nourish one's spiritual life (41).

The Statute once more elaborates the community prayer. It says: "every community is obliged to pray together the Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer and Night Prayer. When a SC is not able to attend these prayers, she is obliged to pray them privately" (Statute 2003: 6). Regarding the sacraments, the Statute says, "If the Eucharist is celebrated, the SC have to attend it every day." The SC is also obliged to receive the sacrament of reconciliation regularly (Statute 2003: 7). Concerning meditation, the Statute says: "every SC has to make her meditation every day at least 30 minutes" (Statute 2003: 7). Regarding the rosary, it says that the SC has to pray the rosary together within the community. Concerning the visitation to the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle it says: "the SC makes her visitation to the Blessed Sacrament at least 15 minutes every day" (Statute 2003: 7). And every year they have to make a retreat (Statute 2003: 8).

We notice that what the SC does here are repetitions of the same activities namely, the daily prayers. These activities become food for their spiritual life from where they grow in directedness to God in all circumstances. This is a way to develop oneself toward solitude (42). To Vincent the way to internalize this directedness to God is being conscious that they are loved by God. It is in His love that God called and chose them to serve Him.

Studying

The second focus is study. The SC have to focus themselves on studies in order to live out their calling. Here, study means a manner of being open and attentive to the realities of the people around them – to open their eyes and heart to the needs of the people, especially the poor in their own social context. By so doing they know better what happens in their surroundings. A good example of this learning process can be derived from the SC's experiences during their parish ministry in Aek Kanopan.

When this community started, the SC were asked to go to the villages to teach the Catholic faith to the people. They taught the sacraments, gave reflections based on Scripture readings, and taught some songs. To them this was the way to help people grow in their faith. Gradually, by meeting people regularly, listening to their stories and seeing the poor condition of daily life in the villages, the SC became aware that teaching the sacraments was not enough. From what they had heard and seen, they learned that they also had to do other things for the people. They found out that a way of caring for the living Church is to discuss with the people in the villages what should be done to lighten their burden. One of the results of this learning from people was that the parish now runs a *credit union*, where parishioners can save and borrow money. By opening their eyes and hearts to the conditions of the people, especially the poor, the SC became conscious and were able to perform their works better. I will discuss this issue more intensively in the next chapter.

Another example of the SC's learning process is the way they dedicated themselves to their task in the hostel, also in Aek Kanopan. They created some activities that were not only attractive to the youth but also educational. They provided daily schedules that help students to achieve their goal at school. At exam times, there is a need to create a new planning that is more suitable for the students. This kind of activities is very much based on analysis of the needs of the students.

Apart from this, the SC are strongly encouraged to read books, especially spiritual books. Every community has a small library. Based on the development of the society, many times the General Council of the SC has to anticipate the near or distant future of all their services; how they can run them in a satisfactory manner. For this reason many SC were, and still are, sent for studies.

Giving Direct Response to the Real Need

The third focus is giving direct response to real needs. Institutionally this is done in the Chapters. In the Chapters the SC actively study and taking decisions to respond to the real needs of the society in which they live. For instance, the Chapter that was held in March 2005 decided to start a new kind of works of charity, that is, caring for "street children" in Pematangsiantar. The SC saw that this kind of work was urgent because many children were doing jobs like polishing shoes or selling cigarettes without proper control or care for them. There are many problems in this regard. Some children prefer

polishing shoes than going to school. Some children give the money which they earn to their parents, while some other children just use it for whatever they like. They grow up in harsh conditions. The SC saw this problem and were concerned about the situation. Therefore they decided to start a new ministry for these children. This is the way of responding to the real need. They make an effort to identify the need by paying close attention to the development of society (cf. 03). The next Chapter also will be the dealing with giving a direct response to the poor.

ARTICLE FOUR: A STATEMENT OF VIRTUES

Article 4

May thus grow in our Congregation a spirit⁷ of simplicity, justice, love, faithfulness and mercy.

The SC need to cultivate these virtues as an aid to keep them going and growing in the right direction in their religious vocation.

The practice of virtues has two levels: an external and an internal one. At the external level, practice plays an important role. A desert monk, John Cassian (ca 360-430), fully recognised the essence of practice. He says that one has to make serious efforts to get a complete grasp of the value of the practice or doing. The people who attain the value of practice are those who have found perfection in the virtuousness of the acts in the self, and not in the words of others. They achieve this understanding as a result of their toil. So in the practice of virtues, people are not only doing service properly, but more importantly, through it, people discover perfection in the virtuous acts. At the internal level, self-consciousness plays an important role. The fact that the practice of virtue requires serious efforts signifies that this process is hard and painful as well. Years of distorted growth have to be re-formed. This is a situation where practice of virtues no longer serves as an obligation, but becomes a way of nurturing, and re-forming one's calling. It becomes like food on which a person lives and grows. This process of interiorization has to go deep, so as to let the person grow

⁷ The term spirit refers to virtue. We can find that the term spirit is referring to virtue in Vincent. For example, instead of saying a spirit of simplicity it says the virtue of simplicity (See chapter I, part II, number 4). Thus simplicity, justice, love, faithfulness and mercy, as we see them in Article 4, are virtues.

into self-consciousness. The result is one who is more freely available, descends to it more deeply and is motivated by it more thoroughly.

This practice of virtue is a process in which emancipation from deformation and consciousness to the goodness of the life of virtue reach their goal by the power of God's virtue. Living the virtuous life is a way. This way begins by freeing up our original directedness toward the truly good, to surrender and to be taken up to God's virtue. Vincent says that to do this, is as God wants it, that is, to do it in love (John Cassian 1997: 512, 506; Waaijman 2002: 666-667).

Article 4 says it is necessary that the virtues of simplicity, justice, love, mercy and faithfulness are cultivated and bloom within the Congregation (04). A short explanation of each virtue is provided.

Simplicity

The first virtue is simplicity. Simplicity is an act of being completely honest. To say things as they are, without covering up anything. In Vincent's words "The heart must not think one thing while the mouth says another" (IX, 81; IX, 605; XII, 172). People who are simple refuse to employ cunning and deceit. They act ingeniously and speak sincerely; their lips are ever in accord with their heart. The reason why this virtue is important is because God is simple and acts more visibly through simple people. Many times strong and practical faith is commonly found among the poor and simple people.

Jesus also expects from His followers the simplicity of a dove and the prudence of a serpent (Mat 10:16). Simplicity of a dove means giving a straightforward opinion in the way we honestly see and do things without double-dealing. The intention is focused solely on God's calling. God wants to deal with the simple. He conceals the secrets of heaven from the wise and prudent of this world and reveals them to little ones (Maloney 1992: 163).

The way of dressing of the SC symbolically carries this virtue: "They are dressed in a simple and in a courteous way" (53). The same thing is practiced in charitable works: "The mission is done in an ordinary way" (55).

Justice

The second virtue is justice. Justice is linked to the attitude of being honest and knowing to respect others. People who possess this quality will not take things which not belong to them. A dishonest person will

act in the opposite way. In many cases poverty is the result of an unfair system. Having this awareness, the Constitution says: "The poverty of human beings is the result of an unjust system that is maintained by certain groups; they take too much from others. Therefore, we take part in action of the people when they demand genuine sharing of wealth in a more just way" (25).

The virtue of justice that the SC have to develop within themselves implies making demands for justice, being on the side of the little ones. This is necessary because the poor are the victims of the unjust system of society. The Constitution says that the Sisters have to allow themselves to be captured by a vision of a better world where God and human beings enjoy their rights. All types of diminishments such as the lack of material things, loneliness, fear, and finding no meaning in life will be demolished. The power that destroys people is identified and will be destroyed in its turn (50).

Love

The third virtue is love. For the SC, love has to be the centre of their life because they believe that they are called or chosen to love God. Love is an orientation to others as it is expressed in the Constitution: 'apostolic works have to be rooted in love towards others' (54).

This virtue is the most prominent one because, in God's goodness, God has called and chosen them to love Him. It is the core of their calling. Vincent was very much aware of this calling. Many times he reminded the Daughters of Charity of the meaning of their name and how they should show worthiness of this name. For Vincent, what makes them Daughters of Charity is not that they spend a long time with the poor, but that their hearts are clothed with love for God and their neighbours. This is exactly what makes them to be a SC. (Waaijman 2000: 37-38). This idea is written in the Constitution of the SC. It is stated: "People believe us, not because we are learned people but because they feel that we love them" (Konstitusi 2003, p. 10).

Vincent's vision of love takes one to a deeper understanding of it. It gives inspiration and even direction to one's vocation. Therefore I quote his vision, as Waaijman did it. Vincent says:

It is not just about the love for God, but also love for one's fellow human beings, out of love for God. This is something so sublime that it exceeds human understanding. We need divine light to be able to fathom

the height, depth and width and glory of this love. We must surrender ourselves entirely to God and to allow this truth to pervade us so that our actions will be determined by it. God has chosen us as instruments of this immeasurable love. He wants this love to spread all over the world. Let us try to get an ever-deeper understanding of this magnificent fact. It will be inexhaustible theme for our life. Should we be able to see it clearly, it would radically change our entire life. We must light the fire of divine love in all people and continue the mission of God's Son. He came to bring fire to the earth and what else can we wish but this fire becomes a blaze and sets everything on fire (XII, 261-262⁸) (Waaijman 2000: 39-40).

Mercy⁹

The fourth virtue is mercy. Mercy is closely related to love. Mercy is making our hearts sensitive to the suffering and misery of others. Seeing someone else's misery affects us and makes us willing to help others (Waaijman 2002: 323-328). This virtue must be carried on to continue the mission of Jesus: "The works of Jesus needs to be continued by His disciples, especially in the places where the life of

⁸ Or, cela ne regarde pas seulement l'amour vers Dieu, mais la charité du prochain pour l'amour de Dieu; remarquez, pour l'amour de Dieu; ce qui est si grand que l'entendement humain ne le peut comprendre; il faut que les lumières d'en haut nous élèvent pour nous faire voir la hauteur et la profondeur, la largeur et l'excellence de cet amour.... Nous devons bien nous donner à Dieu pour imprimer ces vérités en nos âmes, pour diriger notre vie selon cet esprit et pour faire les œuvres de cet amour.... Nous sommes choisis de Dieu comme instruments de son immense et paternelle charité, qui se veut établir et dilater dans les âmes. Ah! Si nous savions ce que c'est que cette sainte application! Nous ne le verrons jamais bien en cette vie; car, si nous le voyions, oh! que nous agirions d'une autre sorte, au moins moi misérable!... Embraser les cœurs des hommes, faire ce que le Fils de Dieu a fait, lui qui est venu mettre le feu au monde afin de l'enflammer de son amour. Qu'avons nous à vouloir, sinon qu'il brûle et qu'il consume tout?

⁹ When we look at Article 4, we will find that the virtue of love is followed by the virtue of faithfulness and then finally by the virtue of mercy. However since the virtue of love and the virtue of mercy are closely related, I prefer to discuss first the virtue of mercy and finally to move on to the virtue of faithfulness.

people has not yet developed" (51). Practising this virtue of mercy is, most of the time, loyalty to those who are in need.

To give an idea of what loyalty to those who are in need means, I will recall a story of the Ladies of Charity and Vincent. In 1647, the Ladies of Charity began to think about abandoning the project of caring for abandoned children because they found it difficult to maintain financial support. They nearly gave up and stopped supplying the upkeep of the children. When he realised this, Vincent asked them to imagine the lot of those children if they really were to stop the charitable help. No charity meant the children would die. Vincent and the Ladies of Charity seemed to have realised this. Loyalty to those in absolute need is an act of mercy. (Pujo 2003: 163-164; Mezzadri 1992: 64-66).

For the SC, being present, especially in places where the lives of people have not yet developed (51), doing activities such as giving education to the young ones, caring for the old people, the sick and handicapped, looking after those who are in need, and looking after the group of people who are ignored by the society (52), are acts of mercy towards others.

Faithfulness

Finally the fifth and the last virtue is faithfulness. Faithfulness is readiness to continue to fulfil in difficult times what was promised in good times. The SC Constitution says this: "Our religious life is supported by faithfulness which we have promised, the faithfulness which we live and the faithfulness which we experience" (11). One cannot deny that difficulties come along in living out this commitment. A hard time of all sorts happens for both short and long period. In this situation the SC have to cultivate the virtue of faithfulness for themselves. "We want to hold on in faith firmly, that is the belief that God leads this world to goodness through the actions of human beings. We want to obey the will of God in our way of life" (34). This is a way to grow in living the will of God. Carrying out the order of God as Jesus did, committed to deeds, to the examples of Jesus Christ who had shown the way to create a better world.

Conclusion

Thus, what can be said this far from our exploration of the spirituality of the Congregation of the SC?

The heart of religious life of the SC is to respond God's call (words, invitation, and love) to imitate His Son, the Evangelizer of the Poor. That is to try as far as they can, to live like him, to want what he wanted, to do what he did, by continuing his mission to re-establish the Kingdom of God. Readiness to respond to this call is expressed by professing the evangelical counsels. And thus one's entire life is aimed at fulfilling God's service and seeking God solely because of love of Him (PC: 5).

The specific form of the SC, imitation of Christ, is drawn from Vincent's vision and mission about religious life i.e., to follow Jesus Christ, Lord and Master who came to be the Evangelizer of the Poor. His teaching is a means for the SC to keep going in the true spirit of their calling. For this purpose the SC articulate Vincent's teaching and write it down in the Constitution. In line with the idea of *Perfectae Caritatis*, they pay attention to the signs of times and the development of Church and society as their guides to understand what they have to do in their mission.

When we pay close attention to Vincent's vision and mission, we see that he follows Christ in a distinctive way. Not in solitude as practiced by Carthusians, nor in poverty as lived out by Capuchins, but in leading people to love God and neighbour. His love of God is incarnated in deeds, in *doing*. This is an active imitation of Christ. This is also the way that the SC follow in the footsteps of Christ. But responding to the signs of the times, forms of this active imitation are re-formulated by the SC for themselves. It then becomes the choice of the SC to decide how they nurture and actualize their spirituality. For example, their specific way of interpreting and practicing virtues, partly in accordance with Vincent, partly inspired by their own situation, can already be found in the Constitution.

Continuity can be seen in virtue of simplicity and love. The SC lives according to these two virtues. But the SC also made a new adaptation of these virtues in their own way. They choose a new aspect of virtue which was not yet foreseen or was not emphasized by Vincent, such as the virtue of justice. This virtue arose based on the awareness that poverty is a result of unjust social conditions.